

IMPACT

By 2019, the SPACE project expects to achieve the following results:



12

New CSOs are functioning and implementing citizens initiatives with the help of financial and operational support from Small Grant Facility.



10

Coaches with different areas of expertise are available to render services to CSOs.



15

Nascent and pioneering CSOs receive customized organizational strengthening training and coaching.

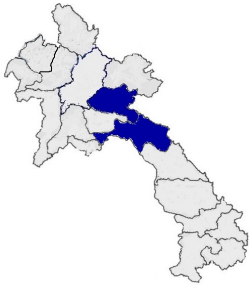


30

Local government staff receive training and guidelines on how to collaborate with CSOs.



QUICK FACTS



Project name:

Supporting Participatory and Accountable Civic Engagement (SPACE)

Location: national level and Xiengkhouang and Bolikhamxay provinces.

Started: Inception 2012-2014,

Phase 1: 2014- 2016

Current Phase:

Phase 2, 2017 --2019

Reach: 5000 people nationwide

Budget: Approx. CHF 750,000

Partners:

Local organizations: PADETC, STELLA
Networks: LIWG, INGO network, CSWG
State bodies: DTEAP (for farmer organizations), National Assembly (for NACOs and Provincial People's Assemblies) and Provincial government line agencies (PAFO, DAFO, and others), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), Lao Women's Union

Donors: Fondation Assistance Internationale (FAI)

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STRENGTHENING CITIZENS' VOICES

Despite some progress in recent years, civil society in the Lao PDR is still weak and misconceptions about its role and intentions linger. Yet, there are emerging opportunities for more citizen participation and an emerging recognition of civil society as a valuable development partner. In order to seize these opportunities, a more enabling environment for civil society organizations (CSOs) needs to be created and the capacity of CSOs strengthened.

The **Supporting Participatory and Accountable Civic Engagement (SPACE)** project aims to raise awareness, clear misconceptions, promote dialogue and build trust at all levels about the role of CSOs and the positive contribution they can have on Laos' development. The project also builds the capacity of new CSOs, so that through these organizations Lao men and women can implement their own initiatives, voice their collective concerns through appropriate channels, and engage in dialogue with the government and other actors about the issues that affect them. As a result, citizens will no longer be just beneficiaries of government policies but development actors in their own right who can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development in Laos.

CONTEXT

Citizen participation is important for the development of Laos. Citizens who have the opportunity to implement their own initiatives through CSOs can contribute greatly to the National Socio-economic Development Plan (NSEDP) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and help Laos to graduate from the status of Least Developed Country (LDC).

The active participation of citizens is consistent with principles articulated in the Lao PDR's Constitution, which states in Article 44 that: "Lao citizens have the right and freedom of speech, press and assembly; and have the right to set up associations and to stage demonstrations which are not contrary to the laws". Article 41 further states: "Lao citizens have the right to lodge complaints and petitions and to propose ideas to the relevant State organizations in connection with issues pertaining to the public interest or to their own rights and interests. Complaints, petitions and ideas of citizens must be examined and resolved as provided by the laws". There are also provisions for public consultation in other laws, such as the 2012 Law of Law-making.

PROJECT

The SPACE project seeks to facilitate this kind of active citizen participation and constructive engagement with the government and other stakeholders on issues that matter to them. SPACE is funded by Fondation Assistance Internationale (FAI) and it is implemented by Helvetas at the national level and in Xiengkhouang and Bolikhamxay provinces. The project aims to facilitate improved understanding and acceptance of civil society activities, and dialogue between citizens and various levels of government. The SPACE project works in close collaboration with other organizations and projects that have similar objectives.

The project has three main elements: (1) encouraging citizens to implement their own initiatives through CSOs; (2) building the capacity of CSOs at the national down to the local level, through workshops on project proposal writing and project cycle management as well as by promoting information sharing that enables CSOs to contribute to the government's national development strategies and working closely with the National Assembly, (3) supporting engagement with Provincial People's Assembly (PPA) members through joint activities and round table discussions, while also facilitating more systematic CSO engagement with both NA and PPA members.

The resulting vibrant civil society will help to mold an inclusive society where all citizens – men and women – are enabled to actively contribute to the shaping of their own future livelihoods and well-being, social cohesion, justice and sustainable development.

KEY ACTIVITIES



Citizens' Initiatives

We facilitate implementation of citizens' initiatives by:

- Operating a Small Grant Facility that offers grants to emerging CSOs to implement initiatives at sub-national level
- Operating "Give-back to the community" challenge: a fund that gives grants to young people who study outside their home communities and want to contribute to "green economy" or address environmental issues affecting their communities



CSOs' Organizational Capacity

We support capacity building of CSOs by:

- Developing and operating a pool of peer coaches who have expertise in various fields and render services to CSOs
- Developing and providing customized organizational training to nascent CSOs



Provincial People's Assemblies and People's Councils

We support Provincial People's Assemblies and People's Councils by:

- Developing capacity and skills of National Assembly Constituency office (NACO) and PPAs
- Developing capacity and enhancing understanding of local government staff on role of CSOs, legislation procedures, and the role of the government



Information Sharing and Networking

We promote information sharing and networking by:

- Facilitating meetings between NA and CSO networks
- Facilitating and financing regional exchanges that enable CSOs to learn from and develop contacts with international CSOs
- Identifying and financing good practices for documentation (VDO, papers)
- Promoting strategic research to support evidence based policy dialogue

TESTIMONIAL

"CSOs still face significant challenges in Laos because the government has traditionally been reluctant to accept civil society organizations that operate outside the state structures. There is a lack of understanding about the role of CSOs in national development," says Mr. Khammouane Si-phonesay, Programme Di-

rector of Learning for Development Association (LDA). "However, CSOs in Laos also have only limited experience and they lack capacity on various fronts. This leads to uncoordinated development project activities and causes unnecessary mistrust and misunderstandings between CSOs and government partners," he says.

LDA, with the help of SPACE project funds, tries to bridge this gap by strengthening the capacity

of nascent CSOs. LDA offers them training through workshops, coaching, exchanges, and study tours that allow CSOs to share and learn from each others' experiences and best practices.

"For example, by documenting ground realities, CSOs can help policymakers and planners to design evidence-based policies and programs to reduce poverty. Working together also helps build trust between CSOs and the government and it

allows CSOs to engage in policy dialogue," says Mr. Khammouane and continues, "In the future, I hope to see CSOs work from the grassroots up to the national level and assist the government in implementing laws and thus support more balanced and inclusive development of our society, our economy and our environment."